

Skyscrapers by the Roots: Reflections on Late Modernism

FRANÇOIS DALLEGRET

ENGLISH

INTRODUCTION

François Dallegret is a Canadian artist of French descent. Having studied architecture at the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts in Paris, he quickly gained recognition for his extraordinary drawings of astrological automobiles, exhibited at the Iris Clert Gallery in 1962 [6]. Drawn to the vibrant, North American cultural scene, he spent a year in New York before settling in Montréal in 1964. Over the course of the following decades, his multidisciplinary work acquired a sound international reputation. The exhibition presents a selection of drawings and photographs of works created by Dallegret between 1962 and 1983, grouped in six thematic clusters.

FANTASTICAL MACHINES [1 to 11]

From the outset, Dallegret has been fascinated by modern technological advancements in design and architecture, which he has interpreted with a technical precision and freedom of imagination that situate his work close to science fiction. His art, however, is also imbued with a buoyant and almost pataphysical humour, in which the body (often his own) plays a central role. His fantastical machines, annotated by explanatory legends, often take the form of dwellings or prostheses that imagine the paradoxical automation of characteristic human realities, such as art or psychology.

DISPLAY CASE:

1. **Artist's notebooks**, 1957-1959. Graphite and ink on paper.
2. « **Faire la place** » **comme** « **gratteur** » **chez un architecte** ["Making space" as a "scraper" at an architect's office], August 1962. Tirage argentique, photographie : François Massal.
3. **Inserts with captions for *Architectural Forum***, May 1964. Editor-in-chief: Peter Blake.
4. ***Cuisinomatique*** [Kitchen-o-matic], 1962. Copper engraving through chemical process on Bakelite.
5. **Original copy of *Bizarre* magazine**, 1964. Edited by Jean-Jacques Pauvert, featuring *Vue frontale de l'iNtro coNvers oMAtic* and *L'iNtro coNvers oMAtic*, 1963, by François Dallegret, with a text by Pierre Saddy.
6. **Original copy of the *New York Herald Tribune***, Paris, Friday, October 19, 1962. Featuring the article "Putting Soul Back Into Production. Parisian Designs Astrological Automobiles" by John Ashbery.

WALL-MOUNTED:

7. ***Anticipation Pyramide*, for the journal *Pétrole Progrès*** [Anticipation Pyramid], 2004 (1962). Inkjet print on Mylar, after an original India ink drawing on tracing paper from 1962, ed. 2/6.
8. ***Anticipation Pyramide*, for the journal *Pétrole Progrès* (Section of a housing unit)** [Anticipation Pyramid], 2004 (1962). Inkjet print on Mylar, after an original India ink drawing on tracing paper from 1962, ed. 2/6.
9. ***L'iNtro coNvers oMAtic*** [The iNtro coNvers oMAtic], 1973. Collage on paper.
10. ***Relationpublicomatique* (Drawing and description)** [Publicrelationomatic], 2004 (1963). Inkjet print on Mylar, after an original India ink drawing on tracing paper from 1963, ed. 3/6.
11. ***Relationpublicomatique* (Drawing)** [Publicrelationomatic], 2004 (1963). Inkjet print on Mylar, after an original India ink drawing on tracing paper from 1963, ed. 3/6.

A HOME IS NOT A HOUSE [12 to 20]

In 1965, Dallegret published his most famous drawings in *Art in America*, as part of the article “A Home Is Not a House” written by British architectural historian Reyner Banham. In this text, Banham speculates about the possibilities offered by new mechanical services (plumbing, climate control, communication devices, appliances, etc.). He envisages these as key to the architectural structures of future homes, replacing traditional walls with lightweight, mobile, protective “environment-bubbles”—a model closer to nature that he associates with the North-American suburb and Philip Johnson’s Glass House, which he sees as a prototype

WALL-MOUNTED:

12. **Preparatory sketches for Reyner Banham’s article “A Home Is Not a House”** in *Art in America*, April 1965. Silkscreens on study tracing paper, 2004, based on original 1964 drawings in black pencil, purple ballpoint pen, and felt-tip pen.
13. **François Dallegret « dans l’attente »** [François Dallegret “in anticipation”], 2004 (1964). Inkjet prints, A.P., photo: Marc Lullier.
14. **Un-house. Transportable standard-of-living package / The Environment-Bubble**, 2004 (1965). Inkjet print on Mylar, based on an original 1965 India ink drawing on acetate, A.P.
15. **Reyner Banham visits GOD, 4825 Sainte-Catherine West**, 2004 (1973). Inkjet print, based on an original 1973 Widelix photograph, A.P.
16. **Power-Membrane House**, 2004 (1965). Inkjet print on Mylar, based on an original 1965 India ink drawing on acetate, A.P.
17. **Trailmaster GTO Transcontinental**, 2004 (1965). Inkjet print on Mylar, after an original 1965 India ink drawing on acetate, A.P.
18. **Super-coupé de long weekend** [Super Coupe for a Long Weekend], 2004 (1961). Inkjet print on Mylar, after an original 1965 India ink drawing on tracing paper, A.P.
19. **When**, 2004 (1965). Inkjet print on Mylar, based on an original India ink drawing on acetate from 1965, A.P.
20. **Anatomy of a Dwelling**, 2004 (1965). Inkjet print on Mylar, based on an original India ink drawing on acetate from 1965, A.P.

VOYAGE IN SPACE [21 to 51]

“Art Fiction” (*Art in America*, 1966) expounds the theme of the technological body of the artist of the future who uses their electric emanations to create sensorial environments [27, 28]. Inspired by the Space Race, the development of various means of communication, and cybernetics, Dallegret also carried out performative actions in the studio, the documentation of which enriched his articles in playful and sometimes unsettling ways [24 to 26, 34, and 40 to 43]. Certain formal motifs migrate from one world to another: *Atomix* (an object in which thousands of small stainless steel beads form aleatory crystallographic configurations) gives rise to a landscape of meteoric atoms in which the artist and benefactor of the future evolve (“Desertomania,” *Art in America*, 1967) [35 to 39, and 44 to 51].

WALL-MOUNTED:

21. ***Space City ‘Astronef 732’***, 2004 (1963). Inkjet print on Mylar, based on an original India ink drawing on acetate from 1963, ed. 2/9.
22. ***Ted’s Opera Cosmic Space Suit***, (2004) 1968. Inkjet print on Mylar, based on an original India ink drawing on acetate from 1968, ed. 4/9
23. ***Ted’s Opera Cosmic Space Suit***, 2004 (1968). Inkjet print on Mylar, based on an original pencil drawing from 1968, ed. 4/9.
24. ***François Dallegret fully equipped on standby after activating his Red Orbital Fluff for an adventure in Space. 4825 rue Sainte Catherine Ouest, Montréal, Summer 1965***, 2025 (1965). Inkjet print, photo: Marc Lullier.
25. ***Training for Space Talk***, 2025 (1966). Inkjet print, photo: Jeremy Taylor.
26. **Contact sheet, *Training for Space Talk***, 2025 (1966). Inkjet print, photo: Jeremy Taylor.

DISPLAY CASES:

27. **Original copy of *Art in America* (March-April 1966, no. 2, vol. 54)** with the article “François Dallegret’s Art Fiction.” Collection of the Musée des Beaux-Arts du Québec.
28. **Original copy of *Art in America* (March-April 1966, no. 2, vol. 54)** with the article “François Dallegret’s Art Fiction.”
29. ***Graphic essay***, 1965. Photostat.
30. **Invitation for the *go dallegret* exhibition at the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal (Château Dufresne), December 14–26, 1965.**
31. **Exhibition view *go dallegret* exhibition at the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal (Château Dufresne), December 14–26, 1965.** Silver gelatin print, photo: Bruno Massenet.

32. **Exhibition opening of *go dallegret* at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (Château Dufresne), December 14–26, 1965, 2025 (1965).** Inkjet print, photo: attributed to John Max.
33. **Exhibition opening of *go dallegret* at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (Château Dufresne), December 14–26, 1965, 2025 (1965).** Inkjet print, photo: unknown to the MAC.
34. ***François Dallegret fully equipped on standby after activating his Red Orbital Fluff for an adventure in Space. 4825 rue Sainte Catherine Ouest, Montréal, Summer 1965,*** 1965. Colour print and inverted colour prints, photographer: Marc Lullier.
35. **Original copy of the "Urbland" issue of *Parallel* magazine no. 6 (February-March 1967).** Cover: François Dallegret, *DOGS – Chiens dingues*, 1966.
36. **Board for *Domus* magazine, no. 446 (January 1967)** with the article "Dallegret Idée per Montréal."
37. **Original copy of *Japan Interior Design* 4, no. 133 (April 1970).**
38. **Original copy of *Art in America*, vol. 55, no. 4 (July-August 1967),** with the article by François Dallegret, "The Future: Desertomania."
39. ***Positive cloud for exposed trip*,** 1967. Silver gelatin print.
40. **« Skraak, Whir-r-r, Ka-Blong. It's God and Co. »** in *The Globe Magazine*, December 7, 1968.
41. **Boards for "Arrogance of Art,"** in *ArtsCanada*, August 1968. Recto.
42. **Six photographs of an action performed in the studio for the article "Desertomania,"** *Art in America* (July-August 1967), 2025 (1966). Inkjet prints, photo: Jeremy Taylor.
43. **Boards for "Arrogance of Art,"** in *ArtsCanada*, August 1968. Verso.
44. **Original copy of the magazine *Vie des arts*, no. 68 (Autumn 1972)** with a reproduction of *Lumikiik*, 1970.
45. ***Kiik 69*,** 1968. Stainless steel, glass, and Bakelite.
46. ***Atoms*,** 1966. Silver gelatin print, A.P.
47. **Original copy of the journal *Art in America*, vol. 55 no. 4 (July-August 1967)** with an article by François Dallegret "The Future. Desertomania."
48. ***Atomix*,** 1966. Plexiglass, 6852 stainless steel beads, 1 mm in diameter.
49. **Model for a promotional pamphlet on the *Atomix*,** 1966. Photo: unknown to the MAC.
50. ***Expo67 Montages*,** 1967. Silver gelatin print.
51. **Contact prints made from a giant *Atomix*,** 1970. Silver gelatin prints.

LE DRUG, THE NEW PENELOPE CAFÉ [52 to 79]

In 1964, Dallegret developed the interior design of Le Drug, a pharmacy located at 2130 Rue de la Montagne, which also functioned as a restaurant, disco, boutique, and gallery (where artists such as Paul Thek and Andy Warhol exhibited). In contrast to the hard-edge style of the pharmacy, the basement was an astonishing environment, the elements of which were covered in a white cement membrane and a coating of transparent epoxy resin. Its organic and quasi-psychedelic forms are reminiscent of other multisensory experimental spaces at the time. Dallegret then designed the New Penelope Café in a radically different manner, using tubular scaffolding, reconfigurable platforms, and work lights (several major artists performed there, including Frank Zappa).

DISPLAY CASES:

52. **Sketch for Le Drug logo**, 2025 (1964). Inkjet print based on an original ink and graphite drawing on tracing paper.
53. **Buttons, matches, and tickets for Le Drug**, 1965. Mixed media.
54. **Plans and annotated sketches for Le Drug**, 2025 (1964). Inkjet print on vellum paper after original felt pen sketches on tracing paper.
55. **Sketch for Le Drug with lighting fixtures**, 2025 (1964). Inkjet prints on vellum paper after original graphite and ink sketches on tracing paper.
56. **Original issue of *Domus* magazine, no. 438 (May 1966)**, featuring an article by François Dallegret: "Un bar à Montréal. François Dallegret," photo: Marc Lullier.
57. ***Artfiction*, project descriptor for Le Drug**, 1964. Typescript.
58. ***Referendum*, invitation to a Labo gallery exhibition at Le Drug**, 1965. Printed.
59. ***Armand Vaillancourt, François Dallegret, and John Max at the opening of the pharmacy-boutique Le Drug, May 1965***, 1965. Silver gelatin print, photo: Gabor Szilasi.

WALL-MOUNTED:

60. ***Opening of Le Drug and the Labo gallery***, 1965. Silver gelatin print, photo: Gabor Szilasi.
61. ***Le Drug poster***, 1965. Silver gelatin print, photo: Marc Lullier.
62. ***Exterior view, Le Drug***, 2025 (1964). Inkjet print, color, photo: Marc Lullier.
63. ***Exterior view, Le Drug***, 1964. Silver gelatin print, photo: Marc Lullier.
64. ***Le Drug pharmacy***, 1964. Silver gelatin prints, photo: Marc Lullier.
65. ***Le Drug under construction***, 1964. Silver gelatin prints, photo: Marc Lullier.
66. ***Le Drug Boutique***, 1964. Silver gelatin print, photo: Marc Lullier.

67. ***Le Drug Pharmacy***, 2025 (1965). Inkjet print, photo: unknown to the MAC.
68. ***Le Drug nov. 1964***, 1964. Tirages argentiques, photo: Bruno Massenet.
69. ***Le Drug Hot under construction***, 1964. Silver print, photo: Marc Lullier.
70. ***Clients of the Drug***, 1965. Silver print, photo: Bruno Massenet.
71. ***Le Drug***, 2025 (1965). Inkjet print, photo: Bruno Massenet.
72. ***Le Drug discothèque***, 2025 (1965). Inkjet print, photo: Marc Lullier.
73. ***Le Drug***, 1965. Silver print, photo: Bruno Massenet.
74. ***Woman seated at a table, le Drug***, 1965. Silver print, photo: Bruno Massenet.
75. ***Le Drug***, 2025 (1965). Inkjet print, photo: Bruno Massenet.
76. ***The New Penelope Café, Montréal, 1966-1967***, 1967. Inkjet prints, photo: Marc Lullier.
77. ***The New Penelope Café, Montréal, 1966-1967***, 1967. Inkjet print, photo: Jeremy Taylor.
78. ***Contact sheet, The New Penelope Café, Montréal, 1966-1967***. 2004 (1967). Inkjet print, photo: Jeremy Taylor.
79. ***The New Penelope Café, Montréal, 1966-1967***, 2025 (1967). Inkjet print, photo: Marc Lullier.

MODULAR ARCHITECTURE [80 to 97]

Dallegret became interested in modular architecture and megastructures early on, as illustrated by his drawings of cellular, pyramidal dwellings published in the journal *Pétrole progrès* in 1962. In 1967, he designed *Palais Métro* in collaboration with Joseph Baker, a modular, multifunctional, and playful project of commercial development intended to occupy the former Palais du Commerce at the Berri UQAM metro station. To promote the project, Dallegret and Baker produced a travel case, which contained a soundtrack, texts, and images (including collages created with Pierre Gaboriau). Although *Palais Métro* was never built, Dallegret and Baker completed other similar projects such as West Village, Crown Center, Kansas City (1972) and Eat & Drink, World Trade Center, New York (1972).

DISPLAY CASES:

80. ***First Palais Métro suitcase***, created with Joseph Baker, collages by Pierre Gaboriau, 1967. Suitcase, metal rings, paper, color photographic prints mounted on cardboard, tape recorder.



Soundtrack, Palais Métro, with Joseph Baker, 1967. Digital track (WAV file), duration: 5 min 32 sec.

81. **Original copy of *Art in America* magazine, vol. 56 no. 4 (July-August 1968)** with the article "Psychedelic Marketing – Palais Métro."
82. **Promotional folder and letterhead for *Palais Métro***, with Joseph Baker, 1967. Paper, cardboard, prints.
83. **Hats for the *Palais Métro* project**, with Joseph Baker, 1967. Cardboard, staples.
84. ***Portrait of François Dallegret and Joseph Baker***, 2025 (1967). Inkjet print, photo: unknown to the MAC.
85. **Study for the "Fun House" project, *Esquire* magazine, no. 426, vol. 71, no. 5 (May 1969)**, 1969. Photographic transfer on acetate and adhesive tape, based on a 1969 India ink drawing on acetate.
86. **Copy of the original drawing for the "Fun House" project, *Esquire* magazine, no. 426, vol. 71, no. 5 (May 1969)**, 1969. Print.
87. « **Fun House** », ***Esquire* magazine, no. 426 vol. 71, no. 5 (May 1969)**, 1969. Original insert (colour print).
88. ***Room without a View. Project for the Toronto Sculpture Garden***, (2004) 1987. Print, based on a 1987 ink drawing and collage on tracing paper.
89. **Model for the *West Village Project, Crown Center, Kansas City***, with Joseph Baker, 1972. Two color photographs and a contact sheet mounted on a fiberboard panel.
90. ***West Village, Crown Center, Kansas City***, with Joseph Baker, 1972. Print.
91. **Original copy of *Architectural Record* magazine (April 1974)**, featuring the *West Village Crown Center, Kansas City* (1972) project by François Dallegret and Joseph Baker.
92. **Axometric drawing for the *West Village Project, Crown Center, Kansas City***, with Joseph Baker, 1972. Print.
93. ***West Village, Crown Center, Kansas City***, with Joseph Baker, 1972. Colour prints, photo: unknown to the MAC.
94. **Original copy of *Interiors* magazine, vol. 134 no. 8 (March 1975)** featuring "Eat and Drink Restaurant and Bar at the World Trade Center, New York (1972)" by François Dallegret and the Harper and George firm.
95. ***Design Philosophy***, 1972. Text by François Dallegret and Joseph Baker for the *West Village Project, Crown Center, Kansas City*, typescript.
96. ***West Village, Crown Center, Kansas City***, with Joseph Baker, 1972. Photostatic axonometries.
97. ***West Village, Crown Center, Kansas City***, with Joseph Baker, 2025 (1972). Inkjet prints, photo: unknown to the MAC.

DIGESTIVE ARCHITECTURE [98 to 107]

In the 1980s, irony became increasingly important in Dallegret's art. In works such as *Râpe à fromage* [Cheese grater], the modernist "machine for living" transforms into a skyscraper with sharp orifices, on which bodies climb or sit, or is swallowed by the earth. *Villa ironique* [Ironic Villa], the ultimate, postmodern "hatcher," proposes an even more sardonic structure, the architecture of which becomes a kind of mechanical, digestive entity; its first excretion is a small "palace" of manure (the extreme opposite of the environment-bubble), at the threshold of which the artist paradoxically salutes us.

DISPLAY CASE:

98. *Lit-croix* [Cross-Bed], 1976. Silver gelatin prints, photo: Alain Cornu.
99. *François Dallegret on his Spring Chair*, 1967. Silver gelatin print, photo: Shunk and Kender.
100. *Miniaturized and cut-out photographs of François Dallegret used in the creation of collages*, 1980. Silver gelatin prints, paint, photocopies, photo: unknown to the MAC.
101. *Râpe à fromage* [Cheese Grater], 1983. Ink and photocopies glued on paper.
102. *Râpe à fromage* [Cheese Grater], 1983. Colour prints.
103. **Original copy of *Section a* magazine (September 1984)**, with "Villa ironique" insert.
Art direction: Odile Hénault.
104. **Canadalleget postcard**, 1967.

WALL-MOUNTED:

105. *Râpe à fromage* [Cheese Grater], 1983. Mixed media.
106. *Râpe à fromage* [Cheese Grater], 1983. India ink drawing on tracing paper.
107. *Villa ironique* [Ironic Villa], 2004 (1983). Inkjet print on Mylar, based on an original ink drawing and photomontage on acetate.

≡ MAC